*Homotopia*

In the centre of the Fellows’ Garden in Balliol College, Oxford, amidst well groomed topiary hedges, stands an old, weathered sandstone monument known to all as Devorguilla’s Tomb. The said Devorguilla (1218- Jan. 28, 1290), noble daughter of Alan de Gallway, married John de Balliol in 1233 and endowed Balliol College in the Year of Our Lord 1263. It would seem fitting for her to be buried in College, amidst her strolling, living Fellows. But, in fact, as John Jones (*Balliol College: A History*, 2005) notes, the stone that bears her name is nothing but a piece of 19th century leftover masonry. My point? Traditions are (as Hobsbawm says) inventions. The past, like Devorguilla’s Tomb, lives in the present It’s nothing but a sign. The past is not some other place. It is no more a place than *utopia* is a word, or a sign, from the past.

*Utopia,* ‘no-place’, as we all know, is an ancient Greek word made up in 1516 by Thomas More, an Englishman. Even the Greek elements of this word are made up. *U-*, which should mean ‘no’, does not mean ‘no.’ The Greek word for ‘no’, in fact, is *ou*. The title of the book should have been *Outopia,* then*?* Utopia’s other part, *topia,* does a little better. On its own it’s almost unattested. But here and there we do find, for example, *atopia*. The *a-* is a negative prefix (technically, it’s called the ‘alpha privative’), a bit like an *ou,* we might say. Look for it among the Neoplatonists, Porphyry and Plotinus, or among the early Church Fathers, It’s a moral term, mostly, a ‘shamelessness’, a ‘strangeness,’ an ‘out-of-place-ness’.

We can, of course, look in other places, for example in Latin (a cognate IE language, which sometimes borrows Greek words), where we do find *topia*, attested, once, in Vitruvius’ (1st c. BCE – 1st c. AD – the father of architectural writing – the science of building things in places…) *On Architecture*. When discussing the conventions of ancient frescos and the depiction of mythological narratives” Vitruvius speaks of the Trojan War and of “the wanderings of Ulysses from one place to another [*per topia*]” (7.5.2). Ulysses, or Odysseus, as he is known in Greek, is, of course, a famous con-man and liar who may, or may not have wandered far and visited many fabulous far-away utopian no-lands, and who, in his famous encounter with the Cyclops (*Odyssey* 9. 366) says, “my name is *ou-tis,* ‘no one’. It’s a pun that keeps Odysseus alive and gets the Cyclops into big trouble (Polyphemus complains to his friends, “No one is trying to kill me”).

*Utopia* too, is a pun, of sorts, on the land of England, by Thomas Morus, in Greek *Môros*, the ‘the stupid one’, ‘the man of folly’ as More’s very good friend, Desiderius Erasmus (Erasmus of Rotterdam, 1466-1536) was hinting when he wrote his punning work, *Morias Encomion*, *In Praise of Folly* (1511).

Even so, *utopia,* ‘no place’, this punning modern ancient word, is a very good word. It has inspired other –topias: *distopias, cacotopias, anti-topias,* Foucauldian *heterotopias* and many *monotopias, allotopias* and *homotopias*. In ancient Greek, as we know, *homos*, means “one and the same”, “common”, “joint”, and, inversely, not *heteros,* not “other.” In compounds it indicates a shared space, a commonality, a uniformity, an identity, either of something in itself or of its contexts, good, bad or neutral. *Homogastrios*, (see Homer’s *Iliad* 24.47), is a brother born “of the same womb.” *Homoglôssos* is someone “speaking the same language”. But these Greek “same” words tend to describe qualities and attributes, not things. “Same” words are often adjectives, hardly ever nouns. *Homodêmia,* for example, a “living among the same people/place [*demos*]”, perhaps “a life of the multitude”, is a rare exception, found only once, in the *Life of Pythagoras* by the 3rd century AD Neoplatonic Philosopher Iamblichus (6.32.1); *Homodoxa*, is another rarity, used by some of the Church Fathers (Eusebius, for example), “a commonality of belief [*doxa*].

*Homotopia,* in any case,this ancient Greek word, is not there in antiquity. It’s an ancient Greek word that lives in the present, and in the present alone - a place, in which the past and the present, and many other things, are one and the same, in which the verbal ‘body’ of the past (like Devorguilla’s mortal coil) might not be there, even as this body’s sign is there to be seen, to be heard or read by all, a sign in which to bury the past, once and for all, as we, the living, walk by.

*Monotopia*

In the centre of the Fellows’ Garden in Balliol College, Oxford, stands an old, weathered sandstone monument known to all as Devorguilla’s Tomb. The said Devorguilla (1218- Jan. 28, 1290), noble daughter of Alan de Gallway, married John de Balliol in 1233 and endowed Balliol College in the Year of Our Lord 1263. It would have been fitting for her to be buried in College, amidst her strolling Fellows. But, in fact, as John Jones (*Balliol College: A History*, 2005) notes, the stone that bears her name is nothing but a piece of 19th century leftover masonry. My point? Traditions are (as Hobsbawm says) inventions. The past, like Devorguilla’s Tomb, is no more a place than *utopia* is an ancient Greek word. As we all know, it was an Englishman, Thomas More, who in 1516, invented the word. Even it’s elements, are invented. *U-*, presumably means ‘no’, but the Greek ‘no’ is ‘ou-’. The title of the book should have perhaps been *Outopia. Topia*, presumably from the common Greek word *topos*, ‘place’ (preserved in modern languages in various compounds and in the sense of ‘site’ and ‘conventional trope’), is likewise not Greek. The best we can do is *topion* (which in the plural could, though never attested, be *topia*), attested only in a rather obscure 1st cent. AD papyrus, meaning a ‘field’, a holy ‘place’ or a ‘burial place’ (like Devorguillas’ Tomb). This word is hardly even a Latinized version, though *topia* is attested in Vitruvius’ (1st c. BCE – 1st c. AD) *On Architecture*, as he is discussing the conventions of ancient frescos and the depiction of “mythological narratives as well as the battle of Troy, or the wanderings of Ulysses from country to country [*per topia*] (7.5.2). Ulysses, or Odysseus, as he is know in Greek, is, of course, the man who wandered far to many no-lands and who, in his famous encounter with the Cyclops in Homer’s *Odyssey* (9. 366, the Cyclopse episode) says, “my name is *ou-tis,* ‘no man’. It’s a pun that keeps Odysseus alive and gets the Cyclops into big trouble. *Utopia* too, is a pun, sort of, by Thomas Morus, in Greek the *môros*, the ‘man of folly’ as More’s good friend, the great scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) was hinting when he wrote his punning book, *Morias Encomion*, *In Praise of Folly* (1511). But it is a very good word, this punning modern ancient word, *utopia*. It has inspired *distopias, cacotopias, anti-topias,* Foucauldian *heterotopias* and many different *monotopias*.  *Monos*, as you know, means ‘alone’, ‘bereft of’, ‘without’, ‘single’, ‘one and no other’. *Monotopia*, then: a single, modern country or place, in which to bury the past, once, and for all.

Vitr. Arch. 7.5.2 [[9]] *nonnulli loci item signorum megalographiam habent et deorum simu- lacra seu fabularum dispositas explicationes, non minus troianas pugnas seu Ulixis errationes per* ***topia,*** *ceteraque, quae sunt eorum similibus rationibus ab rerum natura 7.5.3 procreata. sed haec, quae ex veris rebus exempla sume- bantur, nunc iniquis moribus inprobantur. nam pinguntur tectoriis monstra potius quam ex rebus finitis imagines certae:*

SHA Hadr. 10.4.2. *cum etiam vicena milia pedibus armatus ambularet, triclinia de castris et porticus et 10.5 cryptas et topia dirueret, vestem humillimam frequen- ter acciperet, sine auro balteum sumeret, sine gem-*

Appendix Vergiliana Copa 6 *quam potius bibulo decubuisse toro? sunt topia et calybae, cyathi, rosa, tibia, chordae, et triclia umbrosis frigida harundinibus;*

Things have a way of pointing back to